

The Harvests Of God.

Text: 2 Cor 9:10-11

Suggested Hymns:

564, 567, 563, 446, 568

1) In the Old Testament

2) Of the earth

3) Of our hearts

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is 2 Corinthians 9:10-11 ¹⁰ *Now may He who supplies seed to the sower, and bread for food, supply and multiply the seed you have sown and increase the fruits of your righteousness,* ¹¹ *while you are enriched in everything for all liberality, which causes thanksgiving through us to God.* (NKJV)

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

Today we are celebrating Harvest Thanksgiving. Let us thank the Lord for the way in which He provides for each one of us. I am sure we could all say that He provides for us abundantly, far above our necessities. Today we will see that thanking God was a part of the Levitical Sacrifices in the Old Testament. The child of God is always thankful and grateful to God for both temporal and spiritual blessings. Let us also look at the harvests of God of the earth and of our hearts. May the Lord bless our meditation on this special Harvest Thanksgiving Sunday.

1. Giving Thanks To God In The Old Testament

The people of God in the Old Testament had three great festivals. These were the Festival of Firstfruits, Pentecost, and the Feast of Tabernacles. While each of these three festivals had its own specific purpose, thanking God for the harvest was connected with each one of them.

All three festivals are recorded in Leviticus chapter 23.¹ First we will consider the Festival of Firstfruits. *And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying,* ¹⁰ *“Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them: ‘When you come into the land which I give to you, and reap its harvest, then you shall bring a sheaf of the firstfruits of your harvest to the priest.*

The Festival of Firstfruits was celebrated in the first month of the Jewish year, which corresponds to our March/April. When the children of Israel arrived in the land of promise they became an agricultural people. At that time a sheaf of the first grain harvested was to be brought and waved before the LORD as a grain offering thereby acknowledging Him as the one who enabled the land to produce crops.

In addition a burnt offering and a drink offering were to be brought. A drink offering always accompanied a grain offering to acknowledge that the necessities of life were provided by the Lord.

In the New Testament the term *Firstfruits* are referred to in a number of ways. Paul describes faith in believers, which is the work of the Holy Spirit, as a first-fruit guaranteeing a future harvest. ***“We ... who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.”***² In 1 Corinthians 15:20 Jesus is described as the Firstfruits of the resurrection from the dead,²⁰ ***“But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.”***

The next festival under consideration is the Festival of Weeks. It is also called Pentecost or Harvest.¹⁵ ***“And you shall count for yourselves from the day after the Sabbath, from the day that you brought the sheaf of the wave offering: seven Sabbaths shall be completed.”***¹⁶ ***“Count fifty days to the day after the seventh Sabbath; then you shall offer a new grain offering to the LORD.”***¹⁷ ***“You shall bring from your dwellings two wave loaves of two-tenths of an ephah. They shall be of fine flour; they shall be baked with leaven. They are the firstfruits to the Lord.”***

Fifty days after the Festival of Firstfruits, a feast to mark the end of the grain harvest was to be celebrated. Scripture refers to it as the Feast of Weeks because it came seven full weeks after the Festival of Firstfruits. Its New Testament name is Pentecost, a word meaning “*fiftieth*” in Greek. It was on this day, fifty days after Easter, that the Holy Spirit came upon the disciples.

The Feast of Weeks was a day of rest when all the men of Israel were again to appear before the LORD, and appropriate sacrifices were to be offered. Included in the offerings were fresh loaves of leavened bread. This was the only occasion during the year when this was done. This spring harvest festival was

different from other feasts also in that there were many more sacrifices. After the grain harvest had been gathered it was only proper to thank the Lord.

Their gratitude was also to be evidenced by permitting the poor and the strangers in the land to take the grain left along the edges of the field by the harvesters. Recall how Ruth was able to provide for herself and her mother-in-law, Naomi, by gleaning in the fields of Boaz.

Finally, we look at the Feast of the Tabernacle. ³³ *Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, ³⁴ “Speak to the children of Israel, saying: ‘The fifteenth day of this seventh month shall be the Feast of Tabernacles for seven days to the Lord. ... ³⁹ Also on the fifteenth day of the seventh month, when you have gathered in the fruit of the land, you shall keep the feast of the LORD for seven days; on the first day there shall be a sabbath-rest, and on the eighth day a sabbath-rest. ⁴⁰ ‘And you shall take for yourselves on the first day the fruit of beautiful trees, branches of palm trees, the boughs of leafy trees, and willows of the brook; and you shall rejoice before the LORD your God for seven days.*

The joyous Feast of Tabernacles is named after the structures in which the people were to live during the week-long celebration. Constructed of branches of trees, these “tabernacles” or booths would in the future remind the Israelites of their journey in the wilderness when they were almost constantly on the move and did not have permanent houses in which to live.

It was a festival of thanksgiving for God’s guidance and protection in the wilderness and later, when they were in the promised land, for comfortable homes and other daily blessings. Sometimes it is only when we are deprived of daily blessings such as housing (or food, clothing or health) that we truly begin to appreciate what God provides.

There is one thing that we should all learn from these Old Testament Festivals and that is how much importance God attaches to our recognition of His gifts and our thanksgiving for them.

Our congregation recognises this fact and has therefore set aside this Worship Service as a Service of Harvest Thanksgiving.

2. The Harvests Of God Of The Earth.

First of all our text mentions the harvest of this earth as a gift of God. ¹⁰ ***Now may He who supplies seed to the sower, and bread for food.*** This means that God has not only supplied the seed but also the bread. In other words, without God the seed would not grow and could never become bread. God provides both. As you look around you it is easy to see again that God has fulfilled His promise not to permit seed-time and harvest-time to fail as recorded in Genesis 8:22. It is God's blessing that the fields in our country have brought forth the grain, vegetables, and fruits which we need. We should also thank God that we are able to store food so that it is available to us during the off seasons.

Our shops are filled with food beneficial for our bodies. Let us remember that we have not deserved all this. We confess, and it is true what we confess, that *'we daily sin much and deserve nothing but punishment.'*³ This is what we confess when we pray the Lord's Prayer, *and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us.* We should treasure the explanations found in *Luther's Small Catechism.*

We pray in this petition that our Father in heaven would not look upon our sins, nor on their account deny our prayer; for we are worthy of none of the things for which we pray, neither have we deserved them; but that He would grant them all to us by grace; for we daily sin much and indeed deserve nothing but punishment. So will we also heartily forgive, and readily do good to, those who sin against us.

God has also permitted the sun to rise on the just and on the unjust and has given bread and food to all His creatures. ¹⁵ ***The eyes of all look expectantly to You, And You give them their food in due season.*** ¹⁶ ***You open Your hand And satisfy the desire of every living thing.***⁴ This should certainly move us to rejoice in the Lord and to sing His praises.

Let us also not forget to note the wonderful variety which God provides. What an array of various foods God sends us every year! There are so many types of foods for us to enjoy. Just consider the vast array of vegetables, fruits, grains, nuts and meats. If God would have had given us only one type of food, that would have been more than we deserve.

Let us not forget that God has also given us the ability to prepare these in many different ways. And He has shown us how these may be preserved. How

can we contemplate all this and not be moved to celebrate Harvest thanksgiving with joyful singing.

We should not only think of food but of the whole creation which makes our lives so enjoyable. Consider the flowers of the field for example and the variety of plants and animals. Just imagine if there were no cats, dogs, cows, trees or flowers.

We should also be thankful for what we have in Australia. We have an abundance of things that God has given us. Our shops are filled to overflowing with all that we need to support this body and life. We have not only those things which we need, our daily bread, but our *“cup runs over.”* We have *“fragments that remain.”* We ought to be content if we just had the necessities of life but God has truly given us much more.

And with this food and clothing, God gives us all that we need, for the enjoyment of His gifts, good health, friends, the dear members of our family, house and home, work, transport, power and water, and a government which maintains law and order. We can still live in peace and freely worship God.

On the other hand, How often do we thank God that He disciplines, corrects, chastises and guides us? It would be impossible to list all His temporal and spiritual gifts to us.

To help appreciate what God has done for you, just read the First Article of the Apostles' Creed and you will soon learn how God provides and protects you.

“I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth. *What does this mean?* I believe that God has made me and all creatures; that He has given me my body and soul, eyes, ears, and all my members, my reason and all my senses, and still preserves them;

also clothing and shoes, meat and drink, house and home, wife and children, fields, cattle, and all my goods; that He richly and daily provides me with all that I need to support this body and life;

that He defends me against all danger, and guards and protects me from all evil; and all this purely out of fatherly, divine goodness and mercy, without any merit or worthiness in me; for all which it is my duty to thank and praise, to serve and obey Him. This is most certainly true.”

We certainly have abundant cause to celebrate Harvest Thanksgiving. We have great reason to sing the hymn,⁵

*O that I had a thousand voices,
To praise my God with thousand tongues!
My heart, which in the Lord rejoices,
Would then proclaim in grateful song
To all, wherever I might be,
What great things God has done for me.*

Let us however, beware of ingratitude. May the Lord never say to us what He said to the ungrateful Israelites. We read in Isaiah 1:3, ³ *The ox knows its owner And the donkey its master's crib; But Israel does not know, My people do not consider.*” In other words these people have forgotten who is their God, provider and protector. They have fallen away and have become spiritually blind and do not even understand or acknowledge their creator.

Let us with our whole heart declare with the Psalmist *What shall I render to the LORD For all His benefits toward me?*⁶ and in Psalm 103:1-5, *Bless the LORD, O my soul; And all that is within me, bless His holy name!* ² *Bless the LORD, O my soul, And forget not all His benefits:* ³ *Who forgives all your iniquities, Who heals all your diseases,* ⁴ *Who redeems your life from destruction, Who crowns you with lovingkindness and tender mercies,* ⁵ *Who satisfies your mouth with good things.*

Let us thank God that He has not dealt with us according to our sins nor rewarded us according to our iniquities, but graciously, mercifully and generously has laden us with good things.

3. The Harvests Of God Of Our Hearts.

Now that we have thanked God for our temporal gifts, we need to move on to the best and most precious gifts of God. St. Paul in our text also speaks of them as harvests of God and that is the harvest of God of our hearts.

Our text speaks of *The fruits of your righteousness*. What benefit would all temporal blessings be if God did not give us spiritual blessings with them? Scripture says that *the prosperity of fools shall destroy them* as we read in Proverbs 1:32. The Hebrew word for prosperity also brings out the meaning of

complacency. How true it is that when people become wealthy that they often become complacent and turn away from God. God knows us better than we know ourselves.

Of what good is exuberant health and pockets full of money to a young person, or for that matter to any one, if he does not have the knowledge of using these, of controlling himself, and of managing himself and his affairs? The more of these earthly goods he has, if he has no spiritual blessings, the quicker will be his ruin. Therefore God gives us righteousness.

The righteousness which comes to us is by the forgiveness of our sins. We read in 2 Corinthians 5:19-20 *that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation.* ²⁰ *Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ.* This is a point we should always remember.

It is through Jesus Christ that we have forgiveness and are now at peace with God. This has made the hearts of God's children of all ages sing His wonderful praises. Gratitude for God's mercy in Christ Jesus. Is that not in itself a rich harvest ?

But God gives us also the fruit of this righteousness, the fruit of the Holy Spirit. These are mentioned Galatians 5:22-23. ²² *But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,* ²³ *gentleness, self-control.*

Also, think of your baptism and remember that through Baptism you became a child of the almighty, all-wise, and gracious God and an heir with Christ in His kingdom. This should make us praise God, as recorded in 1 Peter 1:3-5, ³ *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,* ⁴ *to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you,* ⁵ *who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.* This text clearly shows us where our future joy and life lies.

Therefore the riches and happiness which God bestows on us are not to be for this earth, for a short time, only, but throughout all eternity. We rejoice with

David in Psalm 16:11, ¹¹ *You will show me the path of life; In Your presence is fullness of joy; At Your right hand are pleasures forevermore.*

God also promises that we shall see these fruits of righteousness, this harvest of goodness, also in others, in our fellow-Christians, in our Christian relatives, and in our Christian friends.

When we consider the lives of Paul, Peter and many others and note how the Holy Spirit worked in them and produced fruit of righteousness: love, kindness, patience, and courage, we can see that these are all harvests of the heart.

May, then, this harvest, for which God has sown the seed in our hearts, grow and prosper within us, so that today and always we may bring forth the fruit of righteousness for His name's sake.

Let us thank the Lord for the harvests of the earth and the harvest within our heart for which we should be eternally grateful. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

¹ Passover Lev 23:4-14, Pentecost Lev 23:15-21, Feast of the Tabernacles Lev 23: 23, 34-43

² Romans 8:23

³ *Luther's Small Catechism* p 14, the Lord's Prayer, 5th Petition

⁴ Psalm 145:15

⁵ Hymn 446

⁶ Psalm 116:12